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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 000213

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTY SEES JAN. 14 STRIKE AS A VICTORY

Classified By: Poloff Edward Bestic for Reasons 1.4 B and D

11. (C) SUMMARY: A UDPS political party official sees the January 14 general strike in Kinshasa as an indication of his party's renewed strength. According to the official, Vice President Bemba approached UDPS leader Etienne Tshisekedi recently with an offer of political alliance, but Tshisekedi announced publicly he would wait until elections before committing to any partnership. END SUMMARY.

UDPS Sees Itself as Back in the Game

12. (C) Remy Masamba, secretary-general of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) political party led by Etienne Tshisekedi, told poloff February 2 that until recently, the party was weak and could not successfully organize widespread civil unrest. The general strike of January 14, noted an obviously pleased and proud Masamba, showed that the UDPS was back and could effectively shut down Kinshasa. UDPS leaders are well aware that national elections cannot take place by June 30, he explained, but they will continue to insist upon this publicly in order to maintain pressure on the political class. Masamba acknowledged the risk that popular anger, once released, could spin out of control, and expressed concern that if someone assassinated President Kabila or ousted him in a coup d'etat, "no one could predict" the outcome.

No Coalition Partner Yet...

13. (C) Masamba said Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba, leader of the Congo Liberation Movement (MLC), approached Tshisekedi recently with an offer of partnership in a future government. So far, however, MLC proposals only envision Tshisekedi in the number-two slot, such as Vice President to Bemba's President if the Congo adopts a presidential system, or Prime Minister to Bemba's President if there is a semi-presidential system. Masamba said a coalition with the competing People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD) of President Joseph Kabila would be difficult because it would be hard to imagine the 72-year Tshisekedi agreeing to serve under someone less than half his age. As for the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD-Goma), the UDPS no longer sees it as a viable partner because its leaders in Kinshasa have no authority over "those with guns" in the east. The UDPS is not sure who does, but suspects Kigali is calling the shots.

...But Tshisekedi Not Helping Matters Either

14. (C) Unfortunately, said Masamba, Tshisekedi himself is not helping attempts to build political alliances. For example, the UDPS leader declared in a recent speech that his party would not contemplate an alliance with any other party at least until after elections, or after the first round of voting if the country adopts a two-round presidential election system.

COMMENT

15. (C) Civil unrest--violent or not--has long been one of the UDPS' favored tactics. Judging from Masamba's remarks, Tshisekedi's lieutenants appear to feel they have everything

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to gain and nothing to lose by tapping into popular anger and provoking further demonstrations. Masamba's confidence in renewed UDPS strength arising from the January general strike, however, may be misplaced. We believe many people stayed home largely because of fears of potential violent incidents rather than as an expression of support for the UDPS or any other party or cause. As for alliances, aware of how little they got out of their 2002-2003 partnership with the RCD-Goma, Tshisekedi and his supporters are in no rush to sign on as anyone's junior partner--a tendency that is in keeping with Tshisekedi's own personal temperament. END COMMENT.

16. (U) Bujumbura minimize considered.
MEECE